

Parish Review 2016

Our goal is to
Know Christ and make Him Known

As a church family, we aim to:

- Demonstrate God's love to the world
- Declare the good news of Jesus Christ
- Depend on God as part of his family

1. Growing in God and in our Worship

Growing in God is our Diocesan Vision for Growth. The vision is to see flourishing congregations in Suffolk that make a difference. The four priorities of Growing in God are:

- Growing in Depth – responding to the call of Christ in every part of our lives
- Growing in Number – drawing contacts we have into the life of God's kingdom
- Growing in Influence – reaching beyond ourselves in our impact on the wider world
- Growing Younger – building churches whose age range reflects our communities

This matches up closely with our own vision here at St John's and, as part of the Diocesan strategy, St John's was asked to prioritise 3 or 4 aims to help growth. In autumn 2015, the PCC shortlisted the following goals:

1. Organise newcomer teas
2. To improve our advertising presence – specifically by installing new signs in the churchyard visible from the road.
3. Promote CYFA summer ventures for our youth
4. Improve links with the school – in particular to invite the school to make better use of our church building.

In 2016 we managed to achieve 3 out of 4 of these priorities. You can read about our successful newcomer tea held in October 2016 later in this booklet. We have a welcome banner visible to those entering the village and, thanks to Richard Standen, Darry Long and Mike Scott, we have a bright wooden sign visible to those exiting the village. We have not managed to progress CYFA ventures yet, but I was really pleased that the school accepted our invitation to hold their KS2 Christmas Carol celebration in St John's. The school already enjoys coming up for Harvest and I hope to see our links with the school improved further.

An initiative not listed amongst these priorities is our heating upgrade. This is because plans for this were already well underway. Last year saw the installation of large new heaters, which utilise heat already in the system. This has been a major success and we have managed to feel snug and warm even on the coldest winter mornings.



I am also excited by our latest scheme to seek growth. In November 2016, the PCC voted unanimously to try out a new pattern of services, which includes our Breakfast Church initiative. So far this is working very well, and I believe we have an exciting future for both those who love traditional church and for those who prefer something more informal and contemporary.

St John's is a wonderfully diverse congregation made up of all ages and our worship reflects this. Our All Age services on the first Sunday of the month continue to go well and I am very grateful for those who help to make these such a success. Our more traditional services at 11am also continue to have an important place in our life of worship. We aim for a balance between organ and band music on other Sundays and I am very grateful to Sue Wright, Caroline Long, the Blays, Jean Turner and many musicians and the choir for leading us in worship.

We again enjoyed a variety of special services in 2016. Services to mark Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Ascension and Pentecost were enjoyed by many. We welcomed the Battsford Praise Band for a second time in September, which was an uplifting evening of praise and worship. October was a highlight as 6 members of St John's were confirmed by Bishop Mike at a moving service at Cockfield.



Finally, later on in the year, we had a lovely Christingle Service and Christmas services with an amazing 160 celebrating with us at our Christmas Eve family service

2016 was not without its challenges. Our parish share continues to rise, building maintenance continues, some of us faced (and continue to face) significant pastoral issues, some of our members went to be with the Lord and several others have moved on to pastures new. We miss them all.

Many thanks to all who give St John's such a welcoming atmosphere and to all who work so faithfully from finance to flower arranging and from reading and praying to cleaning. I pray for God's leading as we continue to seek to grow in God and our in worship.

Peter Goodridge

2. Youth & Children's Work

Children and youth work at St John's takes place largely on Sunday mornings in term times during regular 10.30am services. An informal crèche is available for the very young each week with toys. Explorers (4-9 years old) and Pathfinders (10 to 13 years old) meet in their own rooms. CYFA (14 to 18's) meet on Sunday evenings at the Rectory.

The SlamJam choir continued to go well in 2016. It was great to see them involved in the Christians Together Good Friday service. Many young people are involved in the 9.30am music group too.

The Explorers group have been using Scripture Union's Splash material. Numbers vary in this group and we are very grateful for the 8 adult leaders who operate this on a rota. Sessions always include a fun opening introduction to the topic, a bible story and a way to encourage the children to use what they have learned in the days and weeks ahead.

In 2016, Pathfinders looked at a range of material including Youth Alpha and CYFA looked at a range of issues from ethics to Mark's gospel as well as enjoying a Safari Supper and film night during the year.



There were many other activities last year for young people, including two Christingles services, "I Can't Wait For Christmas," Messy Church at the Summer and Christmas Fairs, fun at the Church BBQ as well as the all age services.

The primary school came in for their Harvest and Christmas services and Little Elms for their Christmas Nativity. We are also privileged to go into the school for assemblies and as part of the Open the Book team.

Thanks to all who work so hard at St John's with young people, both in the church and in the community.

Caroline Long

3. Prayer Life

Prayer is a vital part of our ministry at St John's – it is the power house; the engine of our parish.

The main St John's prayer meeting takes place fortnightly on Saturdays at 9am in the side chapel in church (or church room on cold days). Here we can bring the concerns of the parish, or ourselves, to the Lord. There have been some wonderful answers to our prayers. Do come and join us if you can.

We also have the prayer chain run and organised by Lisa. It is a great blessing to know there will be 34 or more people interceding on our behalf soon after Lisa receives the requests, by phone or email.

After the morning service, on the fourth Sunday in the month, there is someone in the side chapel to listen and pray with anyone who would like the ministry. Indeed, after any service we can always seek out someone for prayer.



The chapel is there for our use. It is a comfortable and special place. It also includes a "prayer tree", where we can leave a request for prayer.

Pam Millyard

4. Home Groups

We have three home groups, which meet either weekly or fortnightly to discuss the Bible, pray together, share joys and worries and enjoy plenty of laughter and social events.

Groups have looked at a range of Bible studies including 1 Corinthians, Mark's Gospel and contemporary ethical issues. Home groups are a great place to go deeper in the faith, so why not join one? We would love to see you.

Peter Goodridge

Mums the Word

The Mums the Word group continues to meet on Thursday mornings, during term time, at the Rectory, for Bible Study and prayer. We are a small group of mums from St Johns and beyond. This year we have been studying Psalms and Luke's gospel. We are always grateful to our lovely team of babysitters (Katrina, Sally, Margaret, Carol and Rosie) who look after the creche and allow the mums to concentrate!

Lisa Goodridge

Coffee Break

Coffee Break continues at the Rectory on Monday mornings from 10am during term time, for anyone to pop in for coffee/tea, biscuits and chat. We usually have a short "thought for the day" on a Biblical theme. All are welcome.

Lisa Goodridge

5. Ladies Lunch

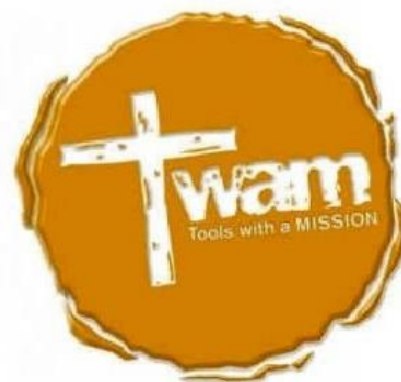
The St John's Ladies Lunch is a happy event held in the Wesley Hall, School Road on one Friday a month. It is a time of friendship and fellowship and an average of 35 ladies attend. A lunch of homemade soup, bread and cheese, followed by fruit, homemade cake and coffee or tea is served.

At each lunch there is a short talk covering numerous subjects of interest and insight into the speaker's life and faith. A summer party is organised in July and a festive Christmas buffet in December. A programme card giving dates of all these events is available in the church. Any further information can be obtained by contacting Brenda Begg on 242025.

All ladies are very welcome. A list is left in the church for names to be added each month. It is helpful to know how many will be present. We thank our God for another year of fun and friendship and the committee members are grateful to all who assist in any way.

Margaret Hitchins

6. Men's Breakfast



Through 2017, an average of 16 to 18 men thoroughly enjoyed indulging in four men's breakfasts. Many thanks to the team who never fail to produce such a wonderful fry-up. As well as enjoying the food, we heard from some fascinating speakers, including Andrew Caldicott from Christian Vision for Men, Hugh Davies from Wetherden Baptist Church, Matt Rushby who spoke about his work with Bury Christian Youth and Malcolm Rogers from St Mary's in Bury, who fascinated us with his tales of visiting Russia and explaining the Trinity from a Russian icon.

Rus Fife

7. Summer Fair

The 2016 Summer Fair was again held at the Wesley Hall rather than outside, because the weather can, obviously, be quite temperamental. However, although the rain threatened, it held off until we had cleared away. I would like to say a massive thank you to our team of helpers - many who turn up to every fair – who ran the stalls and provided lovely things to share, sell and enjoy. What would we do without you all?



People were queuing up to buy jams and chutneys. One guy said that Janet make the best jams EVER! I would like to add that the beetroot chutney is really rather good!

We had all of our favourite stalls, including Messy Church, Children's games, books, water-into-wine, scarves etc – not to mention the café, with lovely cakes and a place to rest your feet and a BBQ for those who wanted something hot.

We would love to see more at the fair and, as always, if anyone has ideas for the forthcoming summer fair, it would be lovely to hear from you. We had a lovely day and raised some funds for St John's. Please come along next time and join in.

Linda Barber and the team

8. Summer Barbecue

Despite a last minute move from the Rectory garden to the Church due to rotten wet weather, the summer barbecue was a great success. Once again many people of all ages came together to enjoy a feast of sausages, burgers, salads and ice cream. There was plenty of fun and games for those of a younger disposition and the opportunity to chat and enjoy each other's company. Praying for a return to better weather in 2017.



Peter Goodridge

9. The Newcomers Tea Party

In October, we turned our church into a party venue! There were sandwiches, cakes, drinks, music and lots of fun. We turned the stage space into a 'games area,' then the youngsters (and young at heart) played Twister and Giant Jenga and various other games. The Newcomers Tea party was a chance to chat and socialise with people who had recently joined, or were thinking about joining, our church family. It was a lovely occasion.



Frances Hall

10. Christmas Fair

I start as always with a big thank you to everyone who helped with so many lovely stalls. There were such wonderful carols, which made the fair so special. The singing was lovely. Father Christmas, as always, made a guest appearance and thank you to Peter, our Rector,

who ran the auction using a range of gifts kindly donated from local businesses and friends (many thanks to Rose and Sally for organising this – a truly tremendous effort).



Teddy Tombola, which is usually such a major hit, was less popular this year. So some teddies had to come home with me to live in the spare room. We had a “Big Ted” donated (he really was big!) and by the close of the fair he still hadn’t found a home. Luckily, Daniel really wanted him and managed to persuade his Mum and Dad to allow him to take Big Ted home. I’m really grateful for that, as the spare room is getting quite full.

We have such a wide selection of stalls – there is something for everyone. The helpers who sold tickets for the Grand Raffle by the front of the hall did a magnificent job and there was a wonderful atmosphere in the café.

Thank you all for such a lot of hard work. It was a super afternoon. Please, as always, let us know of any ideas for new stalls and, if you would like to help us on the day, we would love to see you. It’s a great afternoon and we raise much needed funds for St John’s. Thanks again to all who helped and attended.

Linda Barber and the team

11. Marriage By Design

We believe in marriage and that it is worth fighting for. Marriage By Design is an super day of marriage preparation developed by Care for the Family. We run the day most years to help engaged couples prepare for their married life together by giving them the opportunity to spend quality time talking with each other about their relationship. They are encouraged to share with each other their hopes, dreams and fears for the future and to think through various skills which can help their marriage be as strong and robust as it can be.

The Church Room was again romantically decorated and the couples had an enjoyable day. Many thanks to those who prepared such a delicious lunch for us all.

Peter Goodridge and Miriam Fife

12. The Friends of St John’s Church

‘The Friends’ was started in 1995 when St John’s church was in need of urgent roof repairs. Since then we have raised well in excess of £55,000. Last year’s events included a Sausage Supper, a Harvest Horkey, Coffee Morning after the AGM, a Beetle Drive, as well

as the Annual Service with a guest speaker, a Flower Festival and a Tea Party on the Queen's Birthday.

The Friends also again held Lent Lunches, where we had a Bible study, with questions and discussion followed by a lunch of soup, bread and tea or coffee. We had good numbers – often up to 14. Donations were collected for the Foodbank.

Friends membership is open to anyone who is interested in maintaining our lovely, historic church. The subscription rate is £5 per annum (minimum) and as we are a registered charity we are happy to supply a Gift Aid form.

Proceeds from our events go into the Church Fabric Fund and can be used for repairs, maintenance, insurance, etc.

If you would like to join 'The Friends' please ask Jean Folkard (tel: 242099) for a membership form.

Jean Folkard

13. Christians Together in Elmswell (formerly Elmswell Fellowship of Churches)

a. General Information

For over 40 years the Churches in Elmswell have met to worship together at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and for the last 13 years or so have run a Children's Holiday Club in the Summer. Our aim is to encourage Christian people who live in Elmswell to share fellowship and we would love to welcome people of any denomination or none to our united services which are advertised in the Elmswell Newsletter.

Last year we held joint services on Good Friday at the Baptist Church and on Pentecost at St John's. The Women's World Day of Prayer Service was held at the Baptist Church.

For more information contact Jean Folkard, (tel: 242099), Christians Together in Elmswell.

Jean Folkard

b. Open the Book

We had another busy year going into Elmswell Primary School monthly during term time to act out stories taken from both the Old and New Testament. We have access to a wide range of wonderful props for the stories from Brian Clarke who is the area co-ordinator in Thurston and we are amassing a good selection of our own costumes which bring the characters to life.

We meet up in School at 9am and start with a prayer before going through the chosen story, allocating parts to play and rehearsing it before the assembly starts at 10.15am when all the children enter the hall.

We can usually find a suitable song with actions relative to the story which can be interactive with the children as they enter the hall and join in with great gusto.

Our team consists of myself, Tina, Barbara, Dorothy, Katrina and Caroline (however Caroline has stepped down for a little while) together with Jackie, Dave and Tony from the Baptist Church. John and Celia left for pastures new last summer but we were then joined by Mark and Sally. We are extremely fortunate to have so many people who are passionate about explaining stories from The Bible to the children.

We have got dates lined up with the School until December 2017 so there are many more stories to tell and lots more fun to be had acting them out.

Brenda Begg

c. **Holiday Club**

August witnessed another amazing holiday club - over 60 primary school children came along with 24 Fit Crew (teenage helpers) and 24 adult leader/helpers.

This year the title was "Kingdom Express" and the set was based around a large train in a station. These sets are so clever – not only do they look fab, but hidden gems are revealed throughout the week. On one day the train's number was removed to provide a set of holes for teams to gain points by throwing through bean bags. At another point in the week a model train came out on some smaller track with the memory verse for the day: "Lord your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my way. Psalm 119 v105."



Ian and Elaine Coules were again full of energy at the front, leading songs, using puppets, telling Bible stories about God's love. The children loved it all. Our teen age fit crew were superb again, helping out in so many ways. The outside games were very popular – street dance, football skills, cricket, crazy bubbles, hockey and parachute games. The teenagers were able to enjoy learning how to use the puppets and had a go at some archery. We thank God for his goodness to us for a wonderful week with perfect weather.

The Thursday afternoon Hot Dog Supper was a great opportunity for families to join us for a taste of holiday club and a taste of some wonderful cooking.

Thanks to all who worked so hard to make it all a super week.

Peter Goodridge

14. International and Home Mission Committee

In 2016 our main mission partners were Samaritans Purse (Operation Christmas Child), CPAS, OMF International and the Stowmarket Foodbank, although donations were also made to the "Who Cares?" mission (£163 collected at the evening praise service with the Batisford band and the October Men's Breakfast), £489 to Kagera (the Diocesan missions link at the Archdeacon's Visitation in May), £135 to the Children's Society (through donations made at the Christingle services held in February and November) and £151 to TearFund.

a. Operation Christmas Child

A massive thank you and well done to everyone who supported "Shoebox Sunday" in November. We collected over 120 shoeboxes and are delighted that so many people from Elmswell (and further afield!) decided to support this wonderful project.

"Since 1990, more than 124 million boys and girls in over 150 countries have experienced God's love through the power of simple shoebox gifts from Operation Christmas Child." God bless!

Frances Hall



b. CPAS



The Church Pastoral Aid Society was founded in 1836 and is an Anglican Evangelical Mission working with churches in the U.K. and the Republic Ireland. For many years St John's has been privileged to support their work of spreading the gospel throughout local churches, youth camps, house parties and the publication of resources for church evangelism and teaching in the Church of England.

During this year St John's has supported the work by prayer and giving. We look forward to welcoming the General Director, the Rev. John Dunnett to our CPAS Sunday in June.

Margaret Hitchins

c. OMF

OMF International was originally known as the China Inland Mission. It was founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865 with the goal of reaching the people of China with the good news. Since then it has grown to include bringing the Gospel to the millions of inhabitants of East Asia who have never heard or had access to the message of Jesus Christ.

The work of OMF is diverse, ranging from church planting to missional business, student work to medical practice. The aim is to present the gospel, in a culturally relevant way, through word and deed.

In 2017, St John's started to build stronger links with this wonderful organisation. In particular, we were delighted to welcome Margaret Rugira in December when she came to our all age and BCP services. Margaret is a friend of David Ruddick's (our former curate) and helped with the children's work at the last church weekend away. She has since been working with OMF in Japan for four years and it is our desire to support her (and others in OMF) in prayer. Margaret was fascinating as she explained the Japanese culture and the challenge of reaching out with the gospel in a country where less than 1% are Christian. Margaret continues to be on home leave until the late summer and then she will return to Japan. Her latest prayer letter is pinned up in the church room, but anyone is welcome to sign up to receive it by email.

We were pleased to have raised £42 for OMF through a retiring collection when Margaret visited.

Peter Goodridge

d. Foodbank

We are very pleased to have been able to support the Stowmarket Foodbank again during 2016, giving help to families and individuals during times of need. We are very thankful to all of you who place your donations in the box at the back of church each week. Volunteers from the Foodbank collect from The Rectory on Tuesday mornings. Special thanks also to all who raised £150 for the Foodbank at the Lent Lunches.

Lisa Goodridge